School Closure Process Review

Review Committee Report and Recommendations

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Submitted by the
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1.0 Introduction

In March 2006, the Government announced that a review of legislation covering the process for considering school closures in Nova Scotia would be conducted, and school boards were asked to put their school reviews on hold until after that assessment was completed. A School Closure Process Review Committee was formed to review the sections of the *Education Act*, Regulations under the Act, and school board policies dealing with permanent school closure.

Consultations were scheduled around the province in May 2006; due to the announcement of the provincial election at that time, the consultations were postponed until Fall 2006.

In August 2006, a discussion paper entitled *A Review of the School Closure Process in Nova Scotia/Examen du Processus Relatif aux Fermetures d'Ecoles de la Nouvelle-Ecosse* was prepared by the Department of Education and distributed to education stakeholders in Nova Scotia. Following the release of the discussion paper, a response form was distributed and consultations were held in September and October of 2006 to provide parents, students, school boards and communities an opportunity to have input into the review of the current school closure process.

2.0 The Review Process

Meetings were held across the province with the general public, elected school board members, school board senior staff and the Nova Scotia School Boards Association. The public meetings were held in Sydney (Cape Breton - Victoria Regional School Board), Port Hawkesbury (Strait Regional School Board), Truro and Oxford (Chignecto-Central Regional School Board), Berwick (Annapolis Valley Regional School Board), Yarmouth (Tri-County Regional School Board), Sheet Harbour and Dartmouth (Halifax Regional School Board), Dartmouth (Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial), and Bridgewater (South Shore Regional School Board).

The Department of Education advertised the time and location of the public meetings in local daily and weekly newspapers (in both French and English) across the province during the first week of September and just immediately prior to the public meetings. Information was also available on the website at (www.ednet.ns.ca) and from school board offices and school principals after the advertisements were published.

To facilitate input into the review of the school closure process, School Closure Process Review Response Forms were distributed at public consultations and were also made available on the review website. Response forms and written submissions were received via mail, email, and fax until midnight, October 31, 2006.

This report provides a summary of the information gathered through submitted response forms, written submissions, and the comments and suggestions heard during the consultations. It also highlights key issues to be addressed to improve the effectiveness of the school closure review process.

3.0 Key Findings

This section of the report focuses on the comments and suggestions heard during consultations with the public, elected school board members and school board staff. Feedback from one-hundred and thirty response forms and fifteen written submissions has also been included in this summary.

The common themes that emerged, during the consultations are highlighted below:

1. **Need for Common Criteria:** for identifying schools for review and/or possible closure, specifically to ensure consistency across the province
2. **Expand the criteria:** currently in the Regulations to include:
    1. **Transportation:** impact upon student welfare considering the time students spend on a school bus and geographic terrain of bus route and the cost of transporting students to a receiving school.
    2. **Community:** importance of the school to the community
3. **Timing Issues surrounding the Review Process:**
    a. current time frames as outlined in the Regulations are too short
    b. time of year is challenging as it takes place over the holiday season
    c. there should be a time limit on how many times a school can be reviewed for possible closure
4. **Independent Third Party Involvement:** would ensure the process is viewed as transparent
5. **Nomenclature of the School Closure Process:** the name should be changed to reflect the full range of outcomes that can arise from a review (not just a closure)
6. **Study Committee Membership:** should include teachers and administrators, local politicians from the Province and the municipality, as well as SAC members. Participation of school board members on the study committee was viewed as a conflict of interest
7. **Revising the Role of School Boards:** boards should provide a clear rationale with reference to the criteria as to why a school has been identified for review, and provide the Study Committee with all relevant information at the beginning of the process, including data and data sources used to develop population as well as enrolment patterns and projections
8. **Consolidations and the Capital Construction Process:** the school consolidation process should be examined to determine whether schools that are identified for consolidation should be reviewed in a similar manner to those which are identified for possible closure. Specifically, public consultation should be included as part of the consolidation process, and school closure decisions should be made in conjunction with capital construction and municipal infrastructure planning.

4.0 Summary Table of Common Issues

The following table summarizes the suggestions made by the public, school board members and school board staff within each of these seven common themes.

Issue	Public	School Board Members	School Board Staff
Criteria to identify a school for possible closure	1) standardized, consistent, clear and transparent 2) Need to include: - ability to deliver educational programs - transportation (time, terrain, distance, and cost) - impact on community	- clear, transparent and province-wide - need to include: student enrolment, financial impact, transportation (cost and time), community impact - criteria matrix (weighting of criteria) - access to extra-curricular activities - public school program is primary responsibility	- clear and transparent - demographic data, potential development in the region - ability to deliver public school program - benefit to the community - impact on receiving schools - transportation (time, terrain) - access to extra-curricular activities
Timing of Review Process	- time frame for review is too short - time of year for review should be changed (avoid Holiday season) - schools that have been through a review should be exempt from subsequent reviews	- no consistent suggestion on time frame (from too short to too long) - boards should implement 3-5 year renewal plans for schools - exemption for schools from subsequent reviews	- time frame for review is too short - time of year for review should be changed (avoid Holiday season) - boards should implement 3-5 year renewal plans for schools - exemption for schools from subsequent reviews
Independent Third Party	- appoint an independent consultant to oversee the review process and to enact a formal appeals process	- boards should make the final decision on a school closure	- arbitrator could oversee the final decision and conciliate between parties
Nomenclature	- Need to change the name - do not assume that closure of the school will be the outcome. It should be called a "review process"	- Need to change the name - do not assume that closure of the school will be the outcome. It should be called a "review process"	- Need to change the name - do not assume that closure of the school will be the outcome. It should be called a "review process"
Study Committee Membership	- include local politicians (provincial and municipal), teachers and administrators - participation of school board members may be a conflict of interest	- make SAC participation mandatory - include provincial and municipal representation, however, board member participation is not a conflict of interest	-participation of school board members may be a conflict of interest - make SAC participation mandatory - include municipal representative

There were also specific items of concern raised by the public and school board members, as highlighted below. Suggestions made by school board staff reflected the common themes noted above.

Specific suggestions from the public

- **Involvement of Teachers and Administrators:** teachers and administrators should be permitted to participate on the Study Committee
- **Include School Consolidations:** in the school review process to ensure public consultation

Specific suggestions from school board members

- **Criteria Matrix:** could be used as a means to identify schools for review
- **Community:** the school board's primary responsibility is public school program delivery, not rural economic development
- **Independent Third Party Involvement:** the decision to close a school should remain with the local boards, and not other independent bodies
- **Involvement of Teachers and Administrators:** teachers and administrators should not contradict the actions of the board
- **Study Committee Membership:** participation of school board members on the Study Committee was recognized as a challenging situation but not a conflict of interest

5.0 Consultation Feedback

5.1 Feedback made during Public Consultations

The Department conducted 10 public consultations in Sydney, Port Hawkesbury, Truro, Berwick, Yarmouth, Oxford, Sheet Harbour, Dartmouth, Dartmouth (CSAP), and Bridgewater.

Approximately 230 people attended 10 public meetings and 64 people presented to the Review Committee. This section of the report provides a summary of key issues which emerged from the public consultations.

The public identified specific aspects of the current school closure review process that could be improved. In particular, they would like:

- more information to be available from school boards, specifically around the criteria used for identifying a school for possible closure
- a stronger weighting within the identification process for student and community welfare
- the nomenclature to be changed so as not to predetermine that closure of a school is the only outcome of the review

The specific suggestions made during the public consultations are summarized below by theme:

1. A Shift of School Board Responsibilities

It was noted by some attendees that changing the roles and responsibilities of the school board could positively influence the school review process. It was felt that boards should both assess the ability of the school to deliver the educational program and the effects on students transferring to other schools, while also providing a clear rationale for the recommended outcome of the school review. This information should be provided to the Study Committee at the beginning of the process, rather than having the Committee conduct research in an area in which they are unfamiliar or ill-prepared to undertake.

It was felt that the school board, to be more responsive to the school community, should provide a written response to the Study Committee's report. The response should reflect the board's understanding of the report. Attendees also felt that school board members should physically tour schools that are identified for possible closure, and hold meetings relating to school closure in the school that is under review.

There was also discussion surrounding the legal rights of communities. Communities now have a right to challenge a closure decision in court, and this should be considered in the development of policies and procedures around the closure process.[1]

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[1] *Potter v. Halifax Regional School Board*, 2001 NSSC 106, In the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia. Where it was determined that: "there was a breach of the duty of fairness.... and the applicants are not of good standing on the issue involving the closure of Notting Park (elementary school)"

2. Involvement of Teachers and Administrators

It was noted that teachers and administrators should be specifically included in the school review process. Attendees felt that they should have input into the process. The public mentioned that currently some teachers and administrators fear repercussions from school boards if they participate in the school closure process.

3. Additional comments on the review process

- *Improve communication*: Attendees mentioned that communication needs to improve between the school board and the community. In some cases, lack of communication has led to distrust between the board and the community and the feeling that once a school is targeted for review, the decision has already been made and the community has no means to alter the decision. It was suggested that a communication package be sent to parents and the community of the school identified for review, which clearly indicates roles and responsibilities during the school review process.

- *Suggestions for improved school closure processes*: public feedback indicated that school closure policies should:
  - ensure boards continue to work with communities after their school closes
  - reduce expenses in other areas before looking to close schools
  - provide Study Committees with a stipend
  - use a "Criteria Matrix" when identifying a school for possible closure. This matrix would assign a different weight to each criterion used in the process including student travel time, distance traveled, and extra-curricular activities

- *Principal's Report*: there were varying views on the value of the report from the principal at the receiving school, including a lack of utility, to the need for the principal to receive more assistance from the boards in preparing the report. It was also suggested that more objective statistics be included in the principal's report such as drop-out rates, program offerings and discipline issues.

- *Enrolment patterns and projections*: several people voiced their concerns about considering enrolment patterns and projections as part of the school review process. They noted that when a school is identified for review, parents may transfer their children to another school, thus decreasing the student population of the school under review. It was also recognized that determining populations and projections for the school catchment area can be challenging and that it is important that sources used to develop these data must be clearly articulated and shared between the school board and the Study Committee.

- *CSAP*: respondents from the CSAP school board were primarily concerned with school boundaries and catchment areas and how they affect francophone communities.

5.2 Feedback made during School Board Member Consultations

School board members identified specific aspects of the current school closure review process that could be improved. In particular, they would like:

- clear criteria in place which would be used to identify schools for review
- student and community welfare to be reflected in the identification process
- the nomenclature to be changed so as not to predetermine that closure of a school is the only outcome of the review
- The school board must have full autonomy to carry out the school closure process, within the guidelines established by the Department of Education, and the decision must be final

The specific suggestions made by school board members are summarized below:

1. Use of a Criteria Matrix

A Criteria Matrix was proposed by board members as a means to identify schools for review, including a scoring mechanism for identification criteria. This is similar to how capital construction projects are determined, and would increase the transparency of the way in which schools are identified for review. Board members noted that program delivery and transportation would be heavily weighted while "community" would be weighted the least, because it is not a school board's primary responsibility.

2. Alternative school closure processes

Board members outlined two possible options for school closure process reform:

2.1. A "Renewal Plan" approach

This involves school boards developing and submitting "renewal plans" to the Department of Education, with the following process elements:

- the Minister identifies criteria for the review of schools
- board staff would then use the criteria to identify schools for possible closure
- the municipality would contribute to the process by identifying any growth or development plans
- using this information "renewal plans" would be developed by board staff
- as the province determines the construction and renovation schedule for schools, school renewal plans would be used to determine if schools need to close and what renovations, replacements, etc need to be completed

2.2. The Ontario Approach

This approach was suggested by one board and is described below:

- in Ontario, the funding model has an established framework which allows a school board to receive a capital grant for the purposes of new school construction
- to qualify the board can not have any excess capacity at other schools within its jurisdiction
- boards are responsible for determining whether or not a school should be closed, in accordance with the regulations

3. Additional Comments on the Review Process

- *Principal's Report*: there were varying views on the value of the report from the principal at the receiving school including questioning the utility of the report to suggesting that it include the impact that the influx of students from the closed school would have on the receiving school. An alternative suggestion was that a review be conducted which includes a transition plan for students if a school were to be closed.

- *Factors to include in the analysis of a school under review:* board members thought the following factors should be included: the availability of high quality programming spaces, the impact of incoming students, and the capital construction planning process. Board members also felt that two current factors should be removed: student government finances, and traffic at the school to which students may be transferred.

- *Effective Communication*: board members recognized the need to educate parents on the benefits of a school closure on the students and their educational experience. It was also noted that a school closure can be viewed in a more positive light if parents can be guaranteed something in return such as no combined classes, a new playground, or a cafeteria.

- *A shift of school board responsibilities*: A few board members mentioned that it is the board that should provide complete information to the community on why the school should be closed. The community should then have the opportunity to respond to the information provided by the board.

- *Involvement of Teachers and Administrators*: board members believed that teachers and administrators should not contradict the actions of the board and become involved in the school review process.

- *CSAP*: board members felt that schools should not be closed if there is no alternative for French education in that area. This is a constitutional issue and should be addressed in the legislation.

5.3 Feedback made during School Board Staff Consultations

School board staff identified specific aspects of the current school closure review process that could be improved. In particular, they would like:

- clear criteria in place which would be used to identify schools for review to ensure the process is more transparent and user friendly
- student and community welfare to be reflected in the identification process
- the nomenclature to be changed so as not to predetermine that closure of a school is the only outcome of the review
- full and timely disclosure of all data, information, research and reports that were used in the preparation of the recommendation to close or not close a school
- local Study Committees must have sufficient time to prepare their submission

- the school board must have full autonomy to carry out the school review process, within the guidelines established by the Department of Education, and the decision must be final
- information on the operational efficiencies of keeping schools open, human resource allocations, financial resources, facilities maintenance, and student transportation

The specific suggestions made by school board staff are summarized below:

Alternative School Closure Processes
A revised school closure process was presented by senior staff in one board, and is outlined below:

- **Board/staff responsibilities**: the superintendent of schools and senior staff would have responsibility for both identifying schools to be considered for review and then building a rationale according to established criteria, to justify recommendations to close or not close certain schools
- **External Consultants**: there would be an option of hiring an external consultant to carry out the analysis
- **Superintendent Responsibilities**: the superintendent of schools would have the responsibility of bringing the recommendations to the school board. Once the superintendent's recommendations are presented to the board, then full consideration can be given by the school and the community
- **Final Decision**: after a revised "local study committee" has had sufficient time to carry out its review and submit its position to the board, regarding the recommendations of the superintendent, then the board can make the final decision through a fully public debate of the recommendations, the submissions from the local Study Committee, and other submissions
- **Summary**: using a school analogy: the superintendent and staff would complete their homework assignment and pass it over to the school's Study Committee to be critiqued before the school board assigns the final mark, pass or fail

Comments on the review process
- *Health and safety issues within schools*: a situation was recalled where a school facility was deemed as inadequate and should have been closed; however, the school was required to go through the review process. It was recommended that a separate review process be developed for schools closing due to health and safety reasons.

- *Principal's Report*: some staff members felt that communities do not see the value of the Principal's Report, which is filed after closure. It is regarded as meaningless by the community because the school is already closed, It was suggested that the report requirement be removed from the review process completely.

- *CSAP*: Board staff stated that linguistic assimilation should be part of the criteria when considering a school under review; this will allow smaller schools to continue to operate. It was also noted that closing a French school causes increased cultural assimilation and that this should be reflected in the Regulations.

6.0 Findings from Jurisdictional Review

Research of school closure processes across jurisdictions in Canada revealed several key themes[2]:

In most provinces, school districts/boards are responsible for developing their own school closure processes as long as they are consistent with provincial criteria. Provinces take precautions to ensure proper consideration is given to school closure decisions. Examples include:

- Giving the Minister decision-making authority for school closures
- Strict time lines to ensure the public voice is heard
- Public representatives on School Review Committees

Provincial Items of Interest

British Columbia: School districts are responsible for developing their own school closure processes as long as they are consistent with provincial criteria. All school closures are subject to the order of the Minister.

Alberta: Boards must show consideration of public meetings and cannot make a final closure decision until 3 weeks after the final public meeting.

Saskatchewan: The Saskatchewan *Education Act* sections relating to school closures are written broadly, giving power to the school boards with regard to school closure. Also, there do not appear to be any policies regarding school closure processes. Saskatchewan is currently reviewing its process.

Manitoba: The Board receives a formal report from the School Review Committee, which holds public meetings and comprises members from the community.

Ontario: School boards have significant administrative power when closing a school; they must adhere to the "spirit" of their own closure policies and ministry guidelines.

New Brunswick: The Minister has veto power over school closure decisions; this ensures that rules of procedural fairness have been applied. It is also interesting to note that, upon closure, the school becomes the responsibility of the Minister.

Prince Edward Island: Among jurisdictions analyzed, the province has the strictest guidelines in place.

Newfoundland: Like Saskatchewan, legislation relating to school closures is written broadly,

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[2]Information was gathered primarily through on-line resources provided by each jurisdiction. Educational Acts and Regulations were reviewed as well as applicable policy documents.

giving power to the school boards with regard to school closure. Also, there do not appear to be any clearly defined policies regarding school closure processes. However, recent court cases[3] have revealed that a process of procedural fairness does exist.

Nova Scotia: Under the *Education Act* school boards have the power to make by-laws governing the permanent closure of a public school within its jurisdiction that are consistent with the Regulations. The school board may permanently close a school in accordance with the by-law. In the case where there is no such by-law, the process for school closure must follow the Regulations respecting the permanent closure of public schools.

Québec: The *Education Act* (1988) states that school boards must adopt policies "…concerning the maintenance or closure of schools…" which are subject to guidelines, if any, established by the Minister. There do not appear to be established guidelines.

Summary Table of Jurisdictional Scan

The following table summarizes the results of the cross-Canada jurisdictional scan on school closure review processes.

[3] Newfoundland Supreme Court – Court of Appeal Gushue, O'Neill and Cameron JJ.A.. Heard: September 12, 2000. Indexed as: Mannion v. Avalon East School Board

Issue	Public	School Board Members	School Board Staff
Revising the Role of School Boards	- boards should assess educational situation of a school, and provide clear rational why school should be reviewed -provide information to Study Committee (SC) including data and data sources for population and enrolment patterns and projections -provide written response to SC Report	-board should prove why a school should be closed, then the community should be able to respond	- board should look at every opportunity to keep the school open
Consolidations and the Capital Construction Process	- school consolidations should go through the same process as schools identified for closure - closure decisions should be made in the context of the capital construction process and municipal infrastructure strategies	-the school closure process should be linked to the capital construction process over a 5 year plan -importance of long-range planning in terms of population and demographic changes, for the overall board region	- 3-5 year review plans should tie capital construction planning and school closure review plans together

Comparison of School Closure Policy in Canada										
Issue	**Alberta**	**British Columbia**	**Manitoba**	**New Brunswick**	**Newfoundland**	**Nova Scotia**	**Ontario**	**PEI**	**Quebec**	**Saskatchewan**
Legislation date of latest amendment (original date of legislation)	2000	2005 (1996)	2005	2004 (1997)	2004 (1997)	2004 (1995-1996)	2006 (1990)	1993 (1988)	2006 (1988)	2006 (1995)
Regulations date of latest amendment	2003 (1997)	No	No	No	No	1994	No	1995	No	No
Other policy		2002 Ministerial Order	Departmental Guidelines	2002 DoE Policy						
Responsibility	School Boards	School Boards	School Divisions	District Education Councils	School Boards	School Boards	School Boards	School Boards	School Boards	School Boards
Ministerial Approval Required?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	unclear
School Board closure policy required?	Policy prescribed in regulations	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Report Required?	Yes - Written report to parents	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Community Consultation required?	Yes (the board must hold public meetings)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (opportunity to present to the board)	Yes	Yes	Yes (input into report and public meeting)	Yes	No

7.0 Recommendations

Throughout the consultation process the Review Committee was impressed by the effort that each Nova Scotia school board puts into the school review process, and to meeting obligations under the *Education Act*. Specifically, it was clear that each school board strives to meet the educational needs of its students and to maximize student success and educational attainment, while ensuring schools have strong community support.

To respond to the specific suggestions for improving the current process that were heard during consultations, the Review Committee has developed seven recommendations for revising the current process outlined in the *Education Act Ministerial Regulations*. The Review Committee believes that the recommendations below will strengthen the process for school review with a view to ensuring that it is as effective and objective as possible.

Recommendation 1

Revise the Education Act and Regulations to remove the word "closure" from references to the process, in recognition that closure is only one possible outcome of a school review.

It is essential to the integrity of the process that the outcome of the review is not pre-determined. There are a variety of possible outcomes to the review process, with other possibilities including, but not limited to: space reconfiguration, consolidation, school boundary reviews, alternate use of school areas, and confirmation of the current situation.

Another possible title for the process is "school review".

Recommendation 2

Revise the Ministerial Education Act Regulations to change and bring greater clarity to province-wide criteria for identification of a school(s) for review and mitigating factors.

The process by which schools are identified for review needs to be clear, objective, and transparent. Communities need to be aware of when and why their school may be considered for review. To achieve this, it is recommended that the current identification criteria be clarified and a common definition of each criterion applied across the province. This will ensure that the process is as transparent and consistent as possible.

The initial review should be system-wide in its scope, taking into consideration all schools within a region, and include consideration of the most current information available through capital construction planning processes.

It is recommended that the current four factors for consideration in the identification process, outlined in section 15 (2) of the Regulations, be clarified as follows:

1) Enrolment, including current, historical patterns, and projections.
The source(s) used to develop these projections should be clearly noted. Historic enrolment patterns, including the previous five years as well as projections for the following five years should be considered.

2) General population patterns and projections.
A description of the general population and demographics of the school region should be noted, as well as data on population patterns for the previous five years and a projection for the following five years.

3) Ability of existing school to deliver the public school program.
Data should be provided on the ability of the school to deliver the public school program as described by the Department of Education. This includes, but is not limited to: minimum staffing requirements; staffing provided above the existing staffing ratio; availability of programming spaces; course options available to students, particularly at the high school level; and availability of student support services.

4) School facility operations, including physical condition of building, building operating costs, deferred maintenance costs, facility utilization and anticipated capital requirements.
Factors relating to the school facility must be considered and documented, including but not limited to: space and facility utilization, including excess space; condition of the building structure; costs associated with maintaining and operating the facility; and the construction and renovation schedule for schools as developed by the Department of Education through the capital construction planning process.

It is further recommended that the following mitigating factors could be considered during the identification process, which could lead to deferring a review of a particular school to future years or to removing a school from the list of schools to be reviewed.

Mitigating Factors to be Considered:
- Municipal infrastructure strategies
- Essential Schools as determined by geographic isolation
- Potential development in the area, including projected economic activity

It is recommended that once a school board has approved the initial list of schools to be reviewed, school board staff should be then directed to prepare a comprehensive report, as described in Recommendation 3.

Recommendation 3

School board staff should be responsible for developing a comprehensive School Review Report which provides all pertinent information and an analysis of key factors relating to the review and recommended outcome, and allows for open public debate.

Through the public consultation process, it was made clear that communities often do not have the capacity to gather data and develop the detailed Study Committee report required in the current legislation. It is the view of the Review Committee that school board staff must be required to conduct a comprehensive assessment on each school identified for review, including provision of all pertinent data, and to present this assessment as well as a recommended outcome, to the school community.

It is recommended that once the school board receives the report as presented to them by school board staff, the elected board presents the report to the community. It is recommended that, at a minimum, the elements that are analyzed for each school in the School Review Report should include:

- ability of existing school to deliver the public school program
- any anticipated educational benefits to students of attending another school
- student transportation cost and time
- student access to and participation in extra-curricular activities
- impact on the receiving school(s)
- available information on capital construction planning for the school region
- operational efficiencies that could be gained by closing the school
- operational requirements of keeping the school open
- consideration of staffing allocation
- impact of closing the existing school on the school community
- effect on community use of facilities and regional or community programs administered from the school facility
- impact on educational and social opportunities for community members

The Review Report should clearly identify where possible school consolidations might result in school closures.

It is important that school communities be given an opportunity to respond to the school board report, and to present their position in a public forum. It is suggested that communities, as represented by a Study Committee, be given sufficient time to develop a response to the school board report, including consultation with the public.

School boards should also be given the opportunity to provide any further response to the Study Committee. The school board response to the Committee should be made in public, and include provision for public debate on the board's recommendation.

Recommendation 4

Extend the timeframe of the review process from four to twelve months.

The current school review process takes place within four and a half months (November 30-April 15). The Review Committee feels that this timeframe was too short to allow for adequate compilation and assessment of data and consultation with the school community. The Committee heard that the timing of the review is problematic as it takes place during the holiday season and winter months when transportation can be difficult.

It is felt that the following proposed time frame would allow for thoughtful consideration and discussion of school reviews with sufficient time to ensure public input. It would also allow the school review process to operate in conjunction with the capital construction planning process. The following timeframe would allow for consideration of the Capital Construction report, which is released biannually in April. The Review Committee proposes that the review process timeframe be revised as follows:

April 1:	Based on an initial assessment of all schools in the board region, the school board develops list of schools to be reviewed and directs school board staff to develop a comprehensive School Review Report
May 31:	School board receives School Review Report and it would be released to the public within two weeks of acceptance by the board
November 30:	Study Committee submits response to school board report
March 31:	Final decision made by school board

Recommendation 5

Study Committee membership requirements be revised to encourage participation of education partners, and, where they are established, require membership from the School Advisory Council (SAC).

The review process must be an open and enabling process, and educational and community partners should be encouraged to participate in the process. However, the roles of participants in the process must be clearly defined. Political representatives at provincial and municipal levels, as well as elected school board members could be invited to take part in the process in an observer role. These representatives may have contribution to make to the process, including knowledge about municipal planning processes and provincial initiatives

School Principal
The principal of the school under review should be encouraged to participate in his/her role as a resource to the Study Committee.

School Staff
The review process must be open to all education partners, including teachers, school administrators, and home and school associations.

With the goal of facilitating community involvement in the review process, it is further recommended that, where possible and practical, meetings of the Study Committee be held at the school under review.

Recommendation 6
A transition plan for students be prepared by the principal of a school intended for closure.

The Review Committee heard varying views on the value of the report on educational and social progress of transferred students, which is currently required to be completed by the principal of the school to which students from the permanently closed school have been transferred.

It is recommended that the principal of the school intended for review develop, in conjunction with the principal of the receiving school(s) and with assistance from teaching and administrative staff, a transition plan for students as they transfer to their new school(s).

Recommendation 7
The Department of Education should consider examining the current process and related legislation that governs the school consolidation process.

The Review Committee heard several communities express concern about the school consolidation process. This process is currently part of the school capital construction process, and therefore schools which are being considered for consolidation are not required to undergo the same process as schools which are reviewed.

8.0 Conclusion

The Review Committee recognizes that the school review process is a difficult process for all school boards and the communities involved. The Committee has reviewed the sections of the *Education Act,* Regulations under the Act, and school board policies dealing with permanent school closure, and held public consultations to receive the input of Nova Scotians.

The Review Committee feels that these recommendations will strengthen the process for school review with a view to ensuring that it is as effective and objective as possible, and to providing an educational environment in which Nova Scotia students can achieve learning success.